Soldiers' Poems

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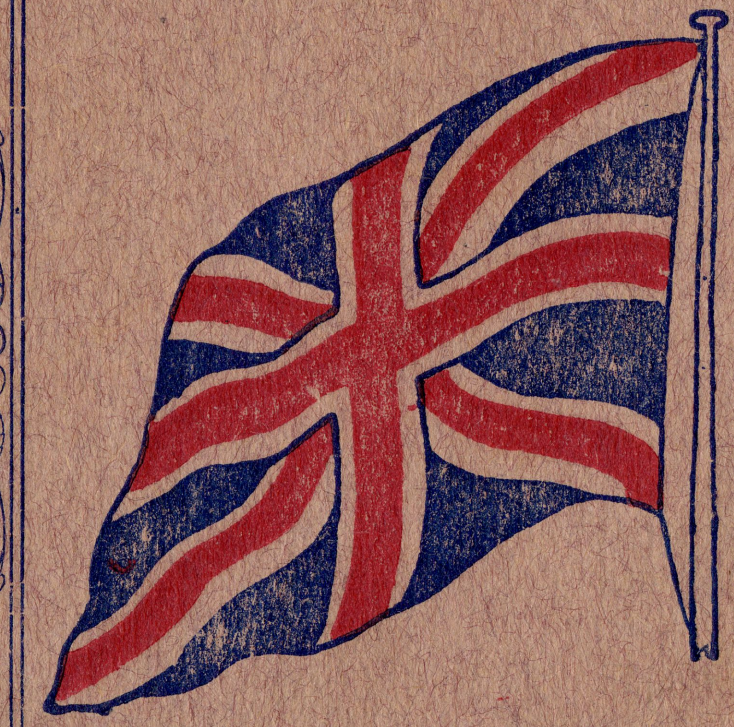

Our Glorious Dead — The Parting.
Anzacs Calling from the Trenches.
Soldiers' Day. — The Comforter.
A Call to Australians.
The Battery "O Pip." — A Soldier's Farewell.
The Reformed Crook. — I want to go Home.
Fallen Comrades.

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Soldiers' Poems

—BY—

SERGT. C T. O'NEILL.

OUR GLORIOUS DEAD.

Say, shall we stand with head bowed down,
And drain the cup of sorrow dry,
For those who heard their country's call,
And for their King did die?

Or, shall we fill life's chalice up
Until it brims with triumph o'er?
We know their names shall deathless be
Who sleep on yonder shore.

Some heard that call in manhood's prime,
And some in manhood's opening day;
They lingered not to count the cost—
They heard but to obey;

Then hied them forth, like knights of old,
To fight for home and loved ones dear.
They faced their foemen with a smile,
They met death with a cheer.

So let us toast "Our Glorious Dead!"
With head erect and flashing eye,
They scaled the dazzling heights of fame;
Then wherefore should we sigh?

Our tears will flow for those at home
Who never felt the flame divine
Which makes the patriot's heart to burn,
His eyes with rapture shine.

O'er those we mourn whose craven hearts
Ne'er left a pang for other's woe ;
Nor struck one blow in Freedom's cause
Against the treacherous foe.

Oh, women dear ! with loved ones gone,
Their graves far o'er the distant wave,
Rejoice, that in your country's need,
You gave a soldier brave.

Be comforted ! 'Twas not in vain
You have your dearest and best !
Thy wounds are raw and bleeding still,
But God hath given them rest.

And tho' no costly marble slab
Rests o'er their lowly bed ;
Deep in our Empire's heart we shrined
Australia's Glorious Dead !

THE PARTING.

Dear little love, don't fret,
'Tis best that I should go,
  At the Empire's call,
  To stand or fall
Against this treacherous foe.
You know I shan't forget,
So, dear little love, don't fret.

Dear little eyes, don't weep,
It fills my soul with pain
  To see you cry,
  For look! the sky
Has a rainbow in the rain;
And death is only sleep,
So, dear little eyes, don't weep.

Dear little heart, don't break,
For should the Fates decree
  That I no more
  See Austral's shore,
Then truly say to me
I died for England's sake,
So, dear little heart, don't break.

SOLDIERS' DAY.

A reveille in the morning, we rise out of our doss,
Grab our blooming towels, an' go an' 'ave a wash,
Get some dirty coffee—without sugar it's made—
An' after we have swallowed arf go out on parade;
They call the roll before yer go—it's no use working lurks;
We go an' do about an hour at what we call Physical Jerks.

Then we goes for breakfast, same as all soldiers do,
An' like a lot of cannibals we bog into the stew,
Growling, ever growling, till we've got onr bellies full;
Next comes washing up, when at cigarettes we pull,
Clean yer boots an' have a shave, then it's 9 o'clock.
Fall in again for parade like a blooming fighting cook.

The O.C. yells out the syllabus, Platoon Commanders carry on;
We all march off like martyrs, who have been trod upon,
Slope arms, stand at ease, not a move, you lazy lout,
Attention, form fours, quick march, you hear the sergeant shout;
Eleven o'clock is come at last, we're walked nearly off our feet,
The language for a quarter-hour would sink the German Fleet.

Turn to again, more drill—that's if it isn't raining—
Then to the stand we go and do some visual training ;
You gaze upon the targets till you're silly in the head,
You wonder what they're coming at, and wish that you we're dead ;
Company, attention, dismiss, is a sound we like to hear,
For our bellies' empty, and dinner-time is near.

The details of the dinner, with you I will not bore,
Except when we are finished we sprawl upon the floor,
A tellin' each other's troubles, and hardships by the mile,
Till the blanky whistle goes, fall in in double file ;
Then the officers come round to see how ye are fareing,
An' all that I can notice is an improvement in the swearing.

The bread and jam it comes at last,
That's the time we do a fast ;
A tin of jam between eight men,
Bread enough to feed a hen ;
Oh, yes, we have a glorious feast,
On nasty rotten jam an' yeast.

Then we're off till 9-30—that's if yer not on guard,
Quarter-Master books fatigue, or cleaning up the yard,
At last post we make our doss, an' think we've earned our pay,
Lights out at 10 p.m. ends a Soldier's Day.

ANZACS CALLING FROM THE TRENCHES

To arms ! Ye Austral Sons. To arms !
The battle's hot and strong ;
There's lots to do for all of you,
All bring your kits along,
Your duty to your country, boys !
Your duty to your King !
Go, well and fit, and do your bit,
Where Maxims snap and ring !

Coo-ee ! Ye stalwart sons ; Coo-ee !
The echo answers back—
All hie away this very day,
Go ! Seek the warland track !
The nation cheers your courage, boys !
You're striking for your King ;
Go, well and fit, and do your bit,
Where Maxims snap and ring !

Press through ! Ye sturdy braves ! Press through !
Your's duty's plain and clear ;
'Though thirsting Hun may snipe and run,
Make sure it costs him dear !
Win freedom for your country, boys !
Win laurels for your King !
Go, well and fit, and do your bit,
Where Maxims snap and ring !

On ! On ! Ye gallant sons. On ! On !
To vict'ry grand and great ;
Go, dare and dash where bayonets alash,
Go, do not tarry late !
They're calling from the trenches, boys !
They're fighting for their King !
Go, well and fit, and do your bit,
Where Maxims snap and ring !

THE COMFORTER.

Silent in the house I sit,
In the firelight and knit,
At my ball of soft grey wool
Two grey kittens gently pull;
Pulling back my thoughts as well,
From that distant, red-dimmed hell,
And hot tears the stitches blur,
As I knit a comforter.

"Comforter" they call it—yes,
Such it is for my distress,
For it gives my restless hands
Blessed work. God understands
How we women yearn to be
Doing something ceaselessly—
Anything but just to wait
Idly for a clicking gate!

So I knit this long grey thing,
Which some fearless lad will fling
Round him in the icy blast,
With the shrapnel whistling past,
"Comforter" it may be, then,
Like a mother's touch again;
And at last not grey, but red,
Be a pillow for the dead.

A SOLDIER'S FAREWELL.

Farewell, dear Australia, the land of our birth;
Farewell to the loved ones, our homes and our hearth.
No more the sweet wattle, all laden with gold—
For one glimpse of its beauty, we'd love to behold.

Now sails the big transport far over the sea,
Three cheers for Australia, the land of the free!
If we ever return to your bright, sunny shore,
It will be when our fighting is needed no more.

Farewell, dear Australia, it may be for awhile—
It may be for ever, our dear sunny isle!
No matter; our loved land, wherever we be,
We'll fight for your honour and liberty.

Then cheer for us, pray for us, help us to win,
For our home and our country, for kith and for kin,
Good-bye, dear Australia, until we return,
To the land of the Emu, the Wattle and Fern.

A CALL TO AUSTRALIANS.

Ye sons of fair Australia,
  Hark to the sound of war,
Hark to the cry of battle
  That thunders from afar.
Now, come, be up and doing,
  Come to the Empire's aid.
Come and assist great England's arms,
  Come, be a soldier made.

We've sent fully three hundred thousand,
  Composed of foot and horse ;
But we are still recruiting,
  To meet foes force with force.
Come, don the bandolier,
  And wear the utmost pride,
The uniform of khaki hue,
  A rifle by your side.

What is this war they be fighting,
  On far-off Europe plains,
On far-off Europe mountains,
  'Mid chilly snows and rains ?
Why should I leave my office,
  My family or my farm ?
Why should I volunteer to fight ?—
  The foe did me no harm.

Thus speaks the craven spirit,
Who duty thinks to shun ;
Who'd rather stay at leisure
Than face the bloody Hun.
But thank the Lord that made us,
There's not many such.
The force can surely leave behind
All mental spirits of this kind,
It will not miss them much.

The war that's fought in Europe,
Decides Australia's fate ;
Just think of that, Australians,
And yet you stand and wait,
If the great cause of Freedom
Were overcome by Huns,
Where would our free Australia be,
Our sheep and cattle runs ?

To the lads on out-back stations,
In offices, or on farms,
How can I speak to move you ?
How can I call to arms ?
Think of our mighty Empire,
Of which we ever sing,
Think of the honour due to all,
To fight for George, our King,

THE REFORMED CROOK.

I've got my piece of paper,
And now I am going home,
Back to my relations,
Never more to roam.

I've swung the lead in many a land,
In France and England, too ;
I've worked my nut and got my cut,
And so perhaps have you.

I have slung a dook and spun a jack,
But since I've been away
I've done my crack with an honest pack,
And always dealt fair play.

I couldn't take my cobbers down
Who'd always with me played ;
I've shewed the double hedder,
And the long and short I've made.

I feel as good as good can be,
And as sure as I write this,
That when I die I'll have wings to fly,
And a long-haired mate to kiss.

I WANT TO GO HOME.

I want to go home ; please grant my plea,
And from your Army set me free ;
I have fought and bled with my comrades true,
And lived on hard tack and horse meat stew.
I have slept in the trenches, and that no lie,
When the rain like bullets fell from the sky ;
When history's done, it will be known,
That I done my bit ; now I want to go home.

I want to go home a battle-scared bit,
To tell the scenes that I'll ne'er forget.
Now when the battle raged fierce and high,
We made the unspeakable fly ;
Our Army eager for the fray
We lead the charge on Anzac Day.
Right in the teeth of the Hellish crew,
We captured the guns and the gunners, too.

Now I want to go home ; of scenes of strife
I have seen enough to last my life.
The rifles' crash and the cannons' roar,
I want to live far from the horrors of war,
In some sweet place to end my days
In a quiet pursuit and peaceful way.
No more to wander, no more to roam,
Mr. Adjutant-General, I want to go home.

FALLEN COMRADES.

Lengthening shadows on lonely graves,
Blistering bones in the sun ;
And I work here at a lonely desk,
With a pen instead of a gun.

And yet I belonged to the 8th Light Horse,
Of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade.
You remember us clattering thro' the streets
And the workmanlike show we made.

And don't you remember the waving flags
Of the crowd, and the stormy cheers,
The women that laughed and played and wept,
And the maid who smiled through her tears.

And I rode there with Pete and Ben,
Their knees pressed hard to mine.
Pete never came back from bloody Anzac,
Ben died at Lonesome Pine!

The shadows lengthen on Peter's grave,
And Ben's bones bleach in the sun,
And I sat here with a pen in my ear
While they fell, one by one.

I wonder how many are left of the men
Of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade,
How many have fallen of those brave chaps
Who fought as hard as they played.

It's not so long since we laughed at the men
Who plugged along per boot;
But the 8th Light Horse was not behind
When the guns began to shoot.

With scarce a thought for the horses they brought,
They went on board with a cheer,
They blazed their track at grim Anzac—
And I sat lonely here.

Out of six hundred and fifty men,
Answered the roll a score.
Their horses may patiently wait on the lines,
But their riders return no more.

Tiny and Lofty, Pete, and Mick,
All of us comrades true,
We lived and loved, and worked and played,
And quarelled, as comrades do.

And I remember how Lofty laughs,
And the way he brushed his hair.
They all of them fell in that one mad rush,
Bar me—and I wasn't there.

I'll bet they were first in that frenzied rush
When the 8th Light Horse went down
In a hail of shell and a burst from hell,
That won them a hero's crown.

Lofty lies still, in Turkish soil,
Mick's eyes stare at the sun,
And Tiny has gone to his last account,
With his fingers clutching a gun.

The skies are blue and the air is clear,
And the sun shines overhead;
But the dearest mates that a man could have
Are numbered among the dead!

No more will Revielle awaken the sleep
Of the boys who have given their "all."
'Tis easy to die; do you wonder that I
Was silent to Duty's Call?

The shadows still lengthen on lonely graves,
And bones still bleach in the sun,
And I sit here at a lonely desk,
With a pen instead of a gun.

So shed me a tear for the gallant Eight,
Of the Third Light Horse Brigade,
Who went to their death with as steady a nerve
As when they rode on parade.

They didn't hang back on the slopes of Anzac,
But charged through a wall of lead,
They dashed and then they died like men!
God rest their gallant dead!

And I wonder what they thought of me
In their shallow graves in the sand—
That I wasn't with them at grim Anzac—
That the tears of a woman held me back,
And the clutch of a baby's hand.

THE BATTERY "O PIP"

Cramped in a crumbling dug-out,
Adjoining "No man's Land,"
And chilled to the bone I squat at a 'phone
That sits on a sand-bag stand.
My ticker points to midnight—
I've two more hours to do,
And keeping awake would wrest the cake
From the torture Tantalus knew.

'Tis here the "eyes" of the battery
Detect the Hun at work;
And targets fair we 'phone to where
Our eighteen-pounders lurk.
Then shoals of high-explosive
Frustrate the plans of Fritz,
Who runs to ground as we promptly pound
His parapet to bits.

When Tommy in the trenches
Is suffering special "Hell,"
From "whizbang," mine, and fine-point nine,
"Turnip" and tear-shell;
He calls for retaliation,
And our waiting gunners know,
When we pass that through, the devil's due
Is more than a quid pro quo.

It's up to us—the peeping
At Fritz through a periscope ;
Likewise to go a-creeping,
And out in the darkness grope
For the " break " where a bursting " Johnson "
Has cut the telephone wire,
Whilst the peeved O.C. of the infantry
Bawls for our battery fire.

Cramped in a crumbling dug-out,
Too near to " No Man's Land,"
To be without a lingering doubt
As to how your " home " would stand
A " coal-box " split upon it,
Or a " liquid fire " rain ;
Hello, hello ! Gee Whiz ! Hello !
The line is " out " again.

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Hearty Greetings

- - from - -

SERGT. C. T. O'NEILL,

Returned Soldier-Poet.